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SADDAM HUSSEIN: OPERATIONAL ARTIST OR MADMAN?

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College, the Department of the Navy or the Department of the Air Force.

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## Abstract of

### **SADDAM HUSSEIN: OPERATIONAL ARTIST OR MADMAN?**

This paper contends that since seizing power in 1979, Saddam Hussein's actions have been and still are guided by a rational operational design that consists of waging a protracted conflict against his own countrymen, against the countries of the Middle East and against the rest of the world in order to fulfill his strategic goal of making himself one of the most powerful men in Arab history.

The author proposes that in order to achieve his strategic goal, Saddam established nine operational objectives.

- 1) Personal Power - Consolidate power within Iraq and leave no opportunity for a coup
- 2) Personal Legacy - Go down in history as a great pan-Arab protector and leader
- 3) Personal Wealth - Live a life of conspicuous consumption rivaling the great kings and emperors
- 4) Control of Oil - Become undisputed leader of OPEC with power to set price and production.
- 5) Unite/Control Arab Nations - Annex or threaten as appropriate in order to unify and control
- 6) Control the Persian Gulf - Control the Gulf and allow free access for Arab/Islamic nations only
- 7) Destroy Israel - Take back their lands including the holy city of Jerusalem
- 8) Establish Palestine - Return the Palestinians to their rightful homeland
- 9) Remove Western Influence - Allow no unwanted interference in Arab matters by Western nations

This paper analyzes the ends, ways, means, and risks of pursuing those objectives and cites the words and deeds of Saddam Hussein to demonstrate their validity. Then this paper examines components of operational art incorporated by Iraq during the invasion of Kuwait, during the military build up of Operation DESERT SHIELD, and during the actual hostilities of Operation DESERT STORM to prove Iraq's actions fit into a rational operational design. Finally, the author suggests that if our goal is to keep Saddam in power, yet too weak to carry out any significant threat, then a military response should not be chosen, but if the goal is to remove Saddam Hussein from power or at least gain his full compliance to UN demands, then the coalition must strike militarily at his strategy. Once he sees all progress made towards achieving his strategic goal being systematically destroyed, he may modify his goal and seek more modest objectives.

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## INTRODUCTION

The heart of operational art revolves around four questions:

- 1) What conditions must be produced to achieve the strategic goal?
- 2) What sequence of actions is most likely to produce those conditions?
- 3) How should resources be applied to accomplish the desired sequence of actions?
- 4) What is the likely cost or risk in performing that sequence of actions?<sup>1</sup>

More simply, these questions can be translated into what are the ends, ways, means, and risks of pursuing a strategy?

It is not necessary for a country in conflict to gather the best minds available and painstakingly analyze and answer these questions. While that may in fact be beneficial, all leaders go through this process at least subconsciously before pitting the resources of their nation against another. Some historians use the gift of hindsight to berate a country (usually the loser) for not considering the concepts of operational art or properly constructing an operational design. It is logical to assume that the nation which more accurately answers these questions will fare better in predicting the outcome of a conflict. However, there are situations where no amount of operational genius can overcome superior resources and situations where no amount of superior resources can satisfy the conditions necessary for the desired end state. The inability to accurately predict the future should not diminish the validity and logic of a country's operational design.

The study of operational art provides a solid framework to guide the mind through the uncertainties of war, but even without this study, all leaders ask and answer many of the same questions. The inability to authoritatively state the past intentions and objectives of these leaders leaves a void in historical analysis and usually leads one to assume that those who were defeated made many mistakes and those who were victorious made few. Another common error is using mirror-imaging, projecting one's own morals and character on another, to ascertain the inner-workings of the enemy's mind. This can be dangerous when trying to decide on a probable enemy course of action. Any actions by the enemy which do not conform to this picture seem irrational and when a pattern emerges that consistently is not what one would expect, the actions are branded "madness".

This is the dilemma America faces while preparing for another showdown with Saddam Hussein, but before dismissing him as a madman, consider that his actions may be an all too rational pursuit of a goal using a carefully crafted operational design. This paper contends that since seizing power in 1979, Saddam Hussein's actions have been and still are guided by a rational operational design that consists of waging a protracted conflict against his own countrymen, against the countries of the Middle East and against the rest of the world in order to fulfill his strategic goal of making himself one of the most powerful men in Arab history.

## SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

This author proposes that in order to achieve his strategic goal, Saddam established nine operational objectives. Using the framework of the four questions posed above, this paper will analyze the ends, ways, means, and risks of pursuing those objectives and will cite the words and deeds of Saddam Hussein to

demonstrate their validity. Then using the same framework again, this paper will examine components of operational art incorporated by Iraq during the invasion of Kuwait, during the military build up of Operation DESERT SHIELD, and during the actual hostilities of Operation DESERT STORM to prove Iraq's actions fit into a rational operational design. Finally, the author suggests some actions that may be taken by the United States and United Nations to frustrate Saddam's plans to reach his strategic goal.

### **PROTRACTED CONFLICT**

In order to clearly understand the nature of Saddam Hussein's operational design, it is necessary to define some terms. Protracted and prolonged are often used interchangeably, but for the purpose of this work, protracted is used to define a purposeful elongation of time, while prolonged is used to define an unintentional elongation. Likewise, conflict and war are usually thought of as synonymous, but conflict refers to a clash of opposing elements using all means at one's disposal, while war defines only those periods of actual armed fighting. These distinctions mean, for example that the "cold war" was really a protracted conflict with no actual war. Similarly, the Korean conflict would refer to the period of time from approximately 1949 to the present while the Korean war would be only the period from 1950 to 1953.

The communist strategy following World War II was based on the tenets of protracted conflict. In order to win a conflict of this nature, strategies must be planned to the scale of decades and there are no decisive defeats except the last.<sup>2</sup> This is in concert with Clausewitz's dictum that, "in war the result is never final."<sup>3</sup> All setbacks are temporary and strength can be gained from the lessons learned whether they are positive or negative. If plans are foiled, that can be reconciled later.<sup>4</sup> Saddam Hussein's connections with both the Soviet and Chinese governments would have exposed him to the concept and tenets of protraction which "integrates war, politics, law, diplomacy, psychology, science, and economics in the conduct of foreign policy."<sup>5</sup> He would also have access to doctrine and writings not available in the West that explore this topic in more detail.

### **OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVES**

The main error made when applying mirror-imaging on Saddam Hussein is imagining he actually cares for the condition of his country and its people. While it is true he longs to be the ruler of a very rich and powerful country, his most basic concern is simply that he remain the ruler. Without question, Saddam Hussein is a selfish and self-centered man who trusts absolutely no one. His ultimate goal can be achieved by self-preservation of his totalitarian rule, self-advancement of his personal wealth and power, and self-aggrandizement through an historical legacy as a savior of all the Arab people.

Saddam's strategic goal requires meeting nine overarching operational objectives. The attainment of these objectives would create the conditions necessary for Saddam's desired end state. Below, this author has postulated and prioritized Saddam's operational objectives in their order of critical importance:

- 1) Personal Power - Consolidate power within Iraq and leave no opportunity for a coup
- 2) Personal Legacy - Go down in history as a great pan-Arab protector and leader

3) Personal Wealth - Live a life of conspicuous consumption rivaling the great kings and emperors of all time

4) Control of Oil - Become undisputed leader of OPEC with power to set price and production.

Control more oil through territorial gains from "illegitimate" states such as Kuwait, the UAE and Bahrain

5) Unite/Control Arab Nations - Annex or threaten as appropriate in order to unify and control all Arab nations

6) Control the Persian Gulf - Control the Gulf and allow free access for Arab/Islamic nations only

7) Destroy Israel - Take back their lands including the holy city of Jerusalem

8) Establish Palestine - Return the Palestinians to their rightful homeland

9) Remove Western Influence - Allow no unwanted interference in Arab matters by Western nations

To some degree, Saddam Hussein has achieved the first three objectives already, but must remain vigilant to protect and advance his gains. The last objective, "Remove Western Influence", must be confronted simultaneously with objective number four, number five, or number six, but is flexibly timed based on events. While this paper proposes that these are the priorities Saddam has assigned to his objectives, it further supposes that he would not pass up an opportunity to jump ahead to a later objective, given the appropriate circumstances and likewise, would be looking to advance towards all these objectives simultaneously if possible.

#### **ANALYSIS OF THE NINE OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVES**

Understanding Saddam's objectives are all completely self-centered and driven by power provides a clearer focus to infer what conditions would be necessary to achieve his desired end state. From this, a course of action must be chosen to reach that end state. The resources available to proceed on Saddam's chosen course compound as each objective is achieved. Thus, his ever increasing circle of wealth, power and military might, gained through success, will provide greater resources for the next objective. Each course of action has risks that generally increase based on the rapidity of its pursuit. A subtle course of protracted conflict poses less risk than an overly aggressive act, but a quick, unexpected strike may also succeed before any nation can react to oppose it.

##### **1) Personal Power**

The most critical objective is Saddam's survival as undisputed totalitarian leader of Iraq. From this position flows the source and continuation of all his power and any action he takes which does not remove him from power could not truly be considered a loss.<sup>6</sup> "The ultimate goal of staying alive, and in power, justifies all means."<sup>7</sup> Key to achieving this goal and ensuring his hold on power is to maintain his security force and the Republican Guard.

Throughout the Arab nations, the historical method of preserving power has always been based on violence and fear. Saddam, who rose through the ranks as a brutal "security" and militia leader of the Baath party, perfected the system of using the stick to ruthlessly squelch internal dissent and the carrot to grant privilege to loyal followers. He periodically purged actual and potential rivals including friends and family

members and likened himself to "The Godfather" in the novel of the same name.<sup>8</sup> Saddam has formed a series of concentric rings of protection around him. Each group closer to his personal security receives more power and privilege and more control over the outer rings. In order to join the inner circle requires unconditional service and allegiance.<sup>9</sup>

When Saddam first seized power from his cousin in 1979, he forced members of the government to join him in personally executing their former comrades that he now considered a threat to his control. This sharing in the violence of the party has created a bond of fear that has kept him in power for almost 20 years.<sup>10</sup> The outer groups are jealous and despise the inner groups for their privileges and thus the inner groups depend on the survival of the regime for their own survival and defend it vigorously.<sup>11</sup>

Proof of Saddam's control was demonstrated during Iraq's 8 year war with Iran. The Ayatollah proffered a cease-fire predicated on the condition of Saddam's removal from power. This proved untenable however, as Saddam's ruthless power system was already so heavily integrated with his family and hometown supporters filling the most lucrative jobs. These Iraqi elite realized Saddam's defeat or removal would mean their defeat as well, causing them to rally around their ruthless leader. Thus, instead of forcing Saddam into exile, Iran unintentionally consolidated his power and left terms for a cease-fire unacceptable at that time.<sup>12</sup>

The Republican Guard and Saddam's elite Security Forces provide the manpower and equipment to deter any coup attempt. Their secret collection of intelligence perpetuates the atmosphere of fear and reinforces strict loyalty to Saddam's regime.

Ruling by terror is a high risk course of action. The catastrophic consequences of failure means death. Saddam balances this risk by making the probability of a successful coup equally dangerous to the culprits and thus a seldom chosen option of his enemies. Saddam exercises constant vigilance to purge potential threats and amply rewards those within the inner circle to keep their loyalty.

## **2) Personal Legacy**

Promulgating the legend of Saddam Hussein for all time is crucial for his self-esteem. Saddam does not appear to be a religious zealot, but would probably concede an honorable death and martyrdom if he believed his legacy would live for all time. When a Soviet diplomat presented him with his impossible situation in October, 1990 he stated, "At least I will have the death of a hero."<sup>13</sup> While he has no wish to accelerate his demise, he realizes his own mortality and takes great comfort in knowing his legacy will be remembered for all time.

The building of statues, monuments, temples and palaces in his honor along with rewriting his history for posterity gives him an important sense of permanence, linking him with Nebuchanezzar, the king who conquered Jerusalem and held the children of Israel captive. He also has perpetuated the myth that he is directly descended from Mohammed, the founder of Islam.<sup>14</sup> Rebuilding the ancient city of Babylon on its original site using special bricks stamped with the mark of Saddam Hussein became one of his top priorities in order to continue this link with history and assert his greatness.<sup>15</sup>



Saddam's personal control of the nation's wealth and budget permit him to build monuments and palaces at his discretion. The complete control over the press and school systems allows his personal history to be rewritten in any manner of his choosing.

Building his legacy in this manner is very low risk as long as he controls the country completely. While some Iraqis undoubtedly resent the priority of spending, the monuments and historical recreations are truly a source of pride to perpetuate Iraq's claim as the birthplace of civilization.

### **3) Personal Wealth**

Saddam can personally control all the wealth of Iraq and continues to build lavish palaces while his people starve. Wealth is also important to buy arms and technology which are tied to his prestige.

Increasing Iraq's oil production will directly increase Saddam's personal wealth. Annexing Kuwait would double Iraq's oil reserve and help to accelerate his financial growth. Saddam has built over 70 palaces and personally controls at least \$5 billion in assets although he could easily "nationalize" any amount he desires.<sup>16</sup>

His wealth is tied directly to the price and sale of oil. The greater the oil reserves at Saddam's discretion, the more he can artificially inflate the price to augment his wealth. Rattling the sword of his military resources can intimidate his partners in the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) to gain their support in order to protect his interests and wealth.

Saddam's conspicuous consumption could invoke a backlash from the poor and starving people of Iraq, but their inability to organize or arm themselves minimizes this risk and makes it a low threat. More likely, peasants will secretly abhor Saddam, but will be unable to voice this dissent as long as he is in power.

### **4) Control of Oil**

In order to reach this objective, all nations in OPEC must accept Saddam's authority to set pricing and production limits. Any reluctance in their support may result in their annexation in whole or in part.

Intimidating all OPEC nations into allowing Iraq to dictate oil policy would allow Saddam to bring a disproportionate amount of oil revenue to Iraq and would create huge economic leveraging power against the rest of the world. Annexing Kuwait and physically controlling their oil reserves would be a huge step towards meeting this objective.<sup>17</sup>

Saddam controls the most formidable conventional military forces in the region. Showing a willingness to use them, as he did against Kuwait with brutal efficiency, would allow him to manipulate the other OPEC nations more effectively through threats and intimidation.

Meeting resistance in this course of action is likely, but Saddam rationalized that the severity of the response would be marginal, making the risk only moderate. While stifling independent sovereign interests of each OPEC nation is difficult and could result in a coalition against Iraq to counter their threats and intimidation, a military response was not expected. Saddam knew that without showing a willingness to use force against a non-complying Arab brother, he would not be able to achieve leadership in OPEC. His assault against Kuwait was carefully calculated against one of the most unpopular Arab nations as viewed by other

Arabs. He did not figure that actually using force would drive scared nations to join together and ask for assistance wherever possible.

#### **5) Unite/Control Arab Nations**

This objective is a natural expansion beyond the control of OPEC. All Arab nations must accept Saddam as the leader of the Arab world either freely, through intimidation or by annexation. Saddam can facilitate this in two ways; by giving the Arabs a common rallying point or enemy, or by turning against an Arab nation under the pretense that they were the aggressors or that they compromised with the Zionists.

A conflict with the West, Israel or Iran is an effective rallying point for many Arabs and would allow Saddam to advance his portrayal of himself as the pan-Arab protector.<sup>18</sup> The Iranian War improved Arab unity, allowing them to rally around a common threat and interest. Had Saddam been successful against Iran, he would have controlled great physical resources as well.

A successful annexation of Kuwait would also establish Iraq as the dominant power in the region, and provide critical access to the Persian Gulf. Saddam believed he could emerge as the hero of the Arab world by punishing an arrogant monarchy for its illegal oil policies and accused Kuwait of economic aggression tantamount to war. Rectifying a long disputed boundary with Kuwait that was arbitrarily imposed by a former colonial power also had much sympathy. Saddam tried to capitalize on the emotional feelings of many Arabs who felt Kuwait and the other tiny sheikdoms were mere products of European imperialism that carved up the Arab world.<sup>19</sup> Kuwait was merely ripe at the moment. Given the proper conditions, Saddam could have just as easily chosen a conflict with Syria or Egypt to set events in motion and assert his authority.

Having the strongest military and controlling the wealth of the Arab states would elevate Saddam as their physical leader. Providing a philosophical agenda which resonates with all Arabs would make him their spiritual and philosophical leader as well. Using his conventional military forces and his weapons of mass destruction (WMD) as a shield would allow him to incite a response from one of the common enemies of the Arab world.

As in the last objective, Saddam expected a response, but not at a military level. Again, without actually using force, he felt his threats would be ineffective. He failed to believe an actual use of force against a country like Kuwait would elicit a military response since no one came to Iran's rescue just 10 years earlier.<sup>20</sup> The greater risk in this objective is that by pretending to represent the interests of all Arab nations against a common enemy (Iran, Israel) could result in an escalation with that enemy without any actual Arab support or involvement. This makes the course of action high risk based on the critical damage that could be done by a military defeat without Arab support.

#### **6) Control the Persian Gulf**

With Russia no longer exercising control and influence over this region, the path is open to control the critical waters of the Persian Gulf. The biggest obstacle is in challenging the only remaining superpower. The United States would undoubtedly continue to assert the right of navigation. Closing the Gulf would inhibit the United States' ability to exert military force in the region.<sup>21</sup> Saddam wrote to President Rafsanjani of Iran in

August, 1990, "Perhaps we could co-operate in preserving the Gulf as a lake of peace and stability free from foreign fleets and powers."<sup>22</sup> In order to achieve this, Saddam must have control or cooperation of Iran, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, and Kuwait. Defeating Iran, as he believed he could quickly do, would have been a huge stepping stone to achieving this.

In the Iranian War, Saddam predicted a two-week victory and believed he could easily capture the Shat al-Arab waterway, the mouth of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers which would provide access to the Persian Gulf. Victory over Iran would provide access and control on the entire eastern shoreline including the Straits of Hormuz. Saddam never intended to invade Saudi Arabia to control the western shoreline, but meant to covertly rule them by intimidation and threat using Kuwait as an example of what might happen should they oppose him.

The use of military force, threats, intimidation, and new found national wealth could be brought to bear to form a coalition of Gulf states. The Straits of Hormuz are still slightly wider (26 nm) than the internationally recognized limit of territorial waters (24nm) across a bay or gulf. This would require a legal and diplomatic initiative or military force to restrict the Gulf to other nations.

As in the previous two objectives, gaining the support of all required nations is difficult and costly. In the Iranian War, even the Arabs supporting him did not want Saddam to win too easily, if at all. While fearing Shiite fundamentalists led by Iran, they were almost equally distrustful of Saddam's ambitions and hoped a prolonged war between the two would weaken them both sufficiently to end their hegemonic desires.<sup>23</sup>

Although Hussein's personal ambitions were the underlying cause of the war, he called for a cease-fire followed by a negotiated settlement when it became apparent that an all-out victory was not likely. A cease-fire satisfied Hussein as it could be sold as a victory to the Iraqi public. He could claim he had contained Persian expansionism and had stopped Tehran's aggressive designs.<sup>24</sup>

The high risk of this course of action was amply demonstrated by the prolonged war against Iran that was more of a stalemate than a victory. To rub salt in the wound, Saddam conceded all his gains from the Iranian war as the United Nations coalition built up forces on his southern border to protest the annexation of Kuwait. In order to keep Iran from taking advantage of Iraq's weakened common border, he wisely chose to settle his differences with them.

#### **7) Destroy Israel**

Power is what fuels Saddam's ambitions and his hatred of Israel only adds fuel to that fire. Military parity with Israel is crucial to standing up to them with impunity.<sup>25</sup> The swift attack by Israel to knock out the Osirak nuclear power plant in 1981 not only put Iraq's nuclear weapons program back to square one, but left a lasting impression on Saddam regarding his inability to retaliate in the face of Israel's nuclear deterrent.<sup>26</sup>

One of Saddam's greatest desires is to build a credible and threatening weapons of mass destruction (WMD) arsenal. Besides augmenting Iraq's conventional forces, a WMD program would achieve a balance of terror with Israel and any other regional threat. The strength of Israel's nuclear deterrent is currently sufficient to limit Iraqi aggression to a lesser level of warfare.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, the critical resource necessary to destroy Israel is parity with them in terms of weapons of mass destruction. Until Iraq has a program capable of deterring Israel from using WMD or retaliating in kind if they do, there is no chance of a military victory. Arab unity against Israel and its protector, the United States, is critical to shaping this future battlefield.<sup>28</sup>

This is the most dangerous objective of all with extremely high risk. Not only does Israel have great military strength backed up by nuclear weapons, but they are closely allied with the United States. Failure in this pursuit is likely if rushed into carelessly and the catastrophic results could include the end of Iraq as well as Saddam's personal wealth, power and legacy.<sup>29</sup>

#### **8) Establish Palestine**

Returning the Palestinians to their rightful homeland with the legitimate recognition of the world is the ultimate symbol of Arab unity and the act that will immortalize Saddam forever. Saddam stated, "what is most important to me...the liberation of Palestine."<sup>30</sup>

This final step can be achieved after the destruction and surrender of Israel. Assuming both Syria and Jordan have joined the brotherhood of Arab states, the region from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf will be united and all will accept Saddam as the leader of the united Arab nation. Diplomatic compromise with Israel is also a possible solution, yet negotiating would be a weaker and more distasteful solution.<sup>31</sup>

Once all resources (WMD, conventional, wealth, economic, Arab unity, etc.) have been brought to bear to defeat Israel or force significant concessions of territory, Palestine can bloom again in the holy land. As a diplomatic alternative, Egypt leads the support in the Arab world for a negotiated settlement which would include concessions by Israel to give the Palestinians a homeland again.<sup>32</sup>

The military option as expressed in the pursuit of objective number seven above is extremely high risk. The diplomatic option has much support throughout the world, but in order to gain credit for the result, Saddam must supplant Egypt as the Arab mediator, something that is not the least bit likely. Diplomatically though, Israel is unlikely to give up much territory and Jerusalem will certainly not be conceded, making the settlement far less than Saddam desires.<sup>33</sup>

#### **9) Remove Western Influence**

The Arabs believe strongly that matters, problems and conflicts that occur in and between Arab nations should be settled by Arabs. Their history and language bind them together in a way no outsider can understand.<sup>34</sup> In order to maintain unity and conflict resolution within the Arab family, the United States, Japan and the European nations should have no undue influence in Arab affairs.<sup>35</sup>

Although his tone towards the U.S. was increasingly hostile before the Kuwait invasion, Saddam would have still preferred to postpone this objective as long as possible while he built up his power within OPEC and the Arab world. While Saddam had not anticipated the intervention of the United States following his Kuwaiti occupation, he used this turn of events to branch into this operational objective.<sup>36</sup> Based on Arab principles, he naturally assumed that the predominant regional philosophy would not allow any Arab nation to

actively support the American infidels. He pledged a jihad (a holy or just war) against the American forces and those aligned with them and continued to expect Arab support to prevent a military response against him.<sup>37</sup>

Had Saddam been able to postpone this objective till the time of his choosing, he anticipated he would have control of OPEC and the Arab nations. Thus, he could exert great economic stress on the oil dependent countries by leveraging those resources of the Arab region and Persian Gulf to eliminate outside interference. When he was forced into this premature confrontation, he counted on Arab unity and psychological operations to shape the battlefield. He used threats of massive casualties from his WMD and large conventional military force in the hopes of deterring, and if deterrence failed, punishing any Western action. He tried to sway world opinion through the use of diplomacy and law, but that failed to materialize. The last resource he counted on was the friendly support of the USSR, China, and France in the UN to prohibit legitimate actions or sanctions against Iraq while he played to United States public opinion by criticizing their imperial manipulation of the sovereign countries of the Arab world.<sup>38</sup>

Had Saddam been able to pursue this objective at the time of his choosing, the risks would have only been marginal. Assuming his success at controlling OPEC and the Arab world, a military response from a non-Arab nation would be seldom likely. However, threats against the West, and in particular the United States, could still escalate into actual military action. Without the unity of the Arabs and other support throughout the world, swaying public opinion and thereby limiting the actions of the United States would be a long and slow process to break America's willpower.

Even when forced into this objective, Saddam still judged the risk of pursuing this option to be only marginal, but the basic assumptions of his assessment were not borne out. He failed to see that his invasion of Kuwait was not justified in the eyes of the world.

#### **OPERATIONAL ART AGAINST KUWAIT - OPERATION DESERT SHIELD/DESERT STORM**

Saddam Hussein not only has a comprehensive, long-term plan, but devised a short-range operational design for his assault on Kuwait and a crisis action plan for his confrontation with the United Nations coalition which were both consistent with achieving his strategic goal. Many elements of operational art including maneuver, fires, deception, sequencing, synchronization, phasing, pause, reserve, sustainment, and psychological operations can easily be seen below. Due to restrictions in space, these will not be discussed, but they illustrate more than a haphazard attempt to use military muscle.

#### **ENDS**

Saddam's invasion of Kuwait was in direct pursuit of objectives number one through number six. Thus the reason for his invasion was not only for the immediate gains of annexing Kuwait, but was the first step in expanding his circle of power. Though he was not anticipating a direct confrontation with the West, the intervention of the United States forced him to branch into objective number nine. Since the United States decided to act, this was an appropriate catalyst to try and undermine Western intervention in Arab affairs. Saddam had planned components for both a non-military and a military operation. Against the coalition, he

clearly favored and believed a non-military solution would be found, but prepared for military operations as a branch should fighting occur.

### WAYS

Iraq's major phases in the Kuwait operation included buildup and posturing, the invasion of Kuwait, consolidation of gains, and a diplomatic and propaganda offensive. He clearly laid the ground work for his "moral" defense by pointing out Kuwait's illegal behavior of pumping more oil than OPEC allotted. This, he said, was tantamount to war and he further threatened and justified the use of force against any country that took such provocative actions.<sup>39</sup>

The invasion into Kuwait was a true Blitzkrieg. With over 1,000 tanks, 900 armored fighting vehicles, and 100,000 men, Kuwait was virtually helpless. The Republican Guard headed straight for the palace where they planned to offer the emir a choice between staying in power (subject to Saddam's wishes) or death. The emir and most of the government had already escaped to Saudi Arabia and Saddam could not find any Kuwaitis willing to play the role of a puppet government. This would have given Saddam a claim to legitimacy by allowing Iraqi forces to pose as freedom fighters, responding to a call from the people of Kuwait to assist them in overthrowing their tyrannical emir.<sup>40</sup> Then, to discourage action against him, Saddam used the communist tactic of threatening war even though he did not want war. He believed he could present the fait accompli of Kuwaiti annexation and then invoke the threats of a war to defend his "legitimate" territory.<sup>41</sup>

It is clear that Saddam did not expect the military buildup in Saudi Arabia in response to taking Kuwait. This assumption was based largely on diplomats' statements that pointed out the "United States had no defense treaties with Kuwait" and "no opinion on the Arab-Arab conflicts, like (a) border dispute with Kuwait."<sup>42</sup> Ambassador April Glaspie said her clear warnings against aggression were edited out of the Iraqi version of her statement.

Iraq's full mobilization into the Kuwait Theater of Operations actually took several months and appeared "largely improvised and piecemeal - with incompletely trained and filled-out units often hastily reactivated or formed - rather than having been readied in advance."<sup>43</sup> This shows little preparation for the Western response and also shows a movement into Saudi Arabia was not seriously contemplated.

Saddam was equally surprised to watch the coalition form against him. He believed he could deter the coalition from picking a military option, but even if that deterrence failed, he was confident he had the military might to fight a spirited defense, avoid a defeat, and wage a protracted war of attrition. Saddam placed great importance on the lessons of the Vietnam War and the Iranian hostage crisis.<sup>44</sup> He intended to endure a protracted war to fragment the coalition, unite Arab and Muslim support against the common enemy of the Western infidels, and destroy US public support through bloody, attritional fighting.

While Saddam and many of his closest advisors had no military experience at all, he still fancied himself a soldier and a great thinker and no doubt dictated Iraqi operations. Through Saddam's speeches and those of his emissaries, it is evident that Saddam performed a "commander's estimate of the situation" to arrive at his course of action. He identified the United States' strategic center of gravity, the source of all power, as

America's national will. He also believed this was a critical vulnerability based on our past history in Vietnam and against Iran during the hostage crisis. He was encouraged by our defeat by a small, determined country and stated that America "is a society which cannot accept 10,000 dead in one battle."<sup>45</sup>

Saddam identified himself as the Iraqi strategic center of gravity. His protection was most dependent on his security forces and the Republican Guard Force Corps. The Republican Guard was not only the bulk of his offensive capability, but the heart of his domestic power and thus was his operational center of gravity. Saddam protected his strategic center of gravity through a number of methods including the use of physical "twins" who were altered by plastic surgery and moved about more openly to lure assassins, as well as military targeting from their true mark.<sup>46</sup>

Communist doctrine states that successful strategists are bold and do not share "the preconceptions and scruples of their more timid opponents and defeat their enemy with strategies and weapons which the latter deem too 'unorthodox' and too fraught with risk."<sup>47</sup> Saddam was aware that Western culture places great importance on legality and legitimacy when waging war. He was also aware of the growing Western trend to not hold a nation's people to blame for the actions of their government.

He attempted to turn these principles to his advantage by using his people as shields and engaging the coalition in legal and moral debates which could cloud the issues of Western legitimacy and legality.<sup>48</sup>

He began psychological operations immediately by attacking the coalition, linking Israel and Palestine to the issue, calling for a worldwide terrorist campaign, destroying the economic and cultural heritage of Kuwait, warning of massive casualties, manipulating his hostages, and threatening the use of chemical weapons should he be attacked. All these operations were designed to deter a military response by the coalition.<sup>49</sup>

The American democratic system, with total freedom of expression, provides an adversary with invaluable clues as to the general mood of the government and the people. Based on debates in Congress and the media and anti-war demonstrations, Saddam believed American support for military action was already weak. He sought to foment this by threatening the Gulf's oil facilities which he believed would translate into higher gas prices and taxes and lead to unemployment and inflation and would reach the interests of the working man in America. He tried to paint a picture that would show the costs to America were not worth the benefits and believed right up to the end that the uproar in America would stop an offensive. His beliefs were reinforced by the continued attempts by Secretary of State James Baker to mediate a solution which he saw as reluctance to fight.<sup>50</sup>

#### MEANS

Saddam believed Iraq's strong military experience and staying power demonstrated in 8 years of fighting Iran proved they could direct effective combat operations. Their strong defensive capabilities against U.S. weapons wielded by Iran and the sheer strength in numbers of his ground forces bolstered his confidence. Using the U.S. standards of force ratios, he anticipated America would not be willing to launch an offensive without the prerequisite 3:1 ratio in forces. This would mean nearly 3 million men and was clearly beyond coalition capabilities.<sup>51</sup>

Regardless, Saddam began building a defense. Should deterrence fail, Iraqi forces established a dug-in defense in-depth, utilizing an elaborate obstacle system that would "trap the assaulting forces in a meatgrinder."<sup>52</sup> Saddam determined the Kuwait-Saudi border, Kuwait City, and the Kuwaiti shoreline were decisive points around which the defenses should be based. Here he could inflict massive casualties and protect his territorial gains.

The defense was based on a "fortress Kuwait" concept guarding the coast and the entire southern border of Kuwait, but leaving much of Iraq open. Again the lessons of Korea and Vietnam led Saddam to believe the US would honor his territoriality and not want to escalate the war beyond Kuwait. The borders were covered with his lessor-trained and equipped light infantry whose mission was to fix the attackers in place. Some mechanized infantry and armored forces would plug any holes and continue the containment until the Republican Guard, augmented with some regular army heavy formations, would act as reserves to either counterattack or defend as appropriate. The defensive positions used mines, fire trenches and obstacles. Oil fields were booby-trapped to create massive fires and dense smoke to blind coalition air and ground forces. The counteroffensive would then force the attackers backwards through the defenses, forcing more casualties. The beaches were likewise fortified with both Republican Guard and Special Forces, ready to thwart an amphibious assault.<sup>53</sup> They anticipated a slow, set-piece battle and believed the desert allowed an ideal defensive posture to trap and annihilate forces in selected fire pockets.<sup>54</sup>

Saddam pictured a long, drawn-out and inconclusive ground war which would prevent the United States from effectively using maneuver warfare. The heavy casualties predicted by even American experts would force a negotiated settlement and allow Saddam to claim the Rumaila oil field and the two contested islands of Bubiyan and Warba. Saddam was willing to allow the Kuwaiti government and ruling family back in the country since he did not feel this would hinder his long range plans. Kuwait would most certainly be intimidated by Iraq and would think quite carefully before ever standing against them again.<sup>55</sup>

Saddam discounted air power as indecisive in any war. Again using the Vietnam analogy, he believed air strikes would be ineffective and of short duration prior to the ground war. He anticipated his air defense forces, composed of a wide range of surface-to-air missiles, anti-aircraft artillery, and modern Soviet-made aircraft flown by combat veterans would exact a high price for each mission. This, coupled with prevalent dust and smoke that would hinder the United States' high-tech, optical weapons and the anticipated difficulty in striking dug-in Iraqi positions, would minimize the impact of coalition air superiority.<sup>56</sup>

When the air war continued longer than anticipated, Iraq tried to draw the coalition into the ground war, stating "because of its cowardice and fear (the U.S.) has avoided engaging in any serious contact with our valiant ground sectors."<sup>57</sup> This desire for ground combat on Iraq's terms also led to the attack against Al-Khafji. However, once it was repelled, UN forces continued to patiently wait and allowed the air strikes to continue their pounding.

While Saddam probably had both chemical and biological weapons ready for deployment, his respect for the United States' nuclear arsenal precluded their use. The total destruction of Baghdad would end



Saddam's regime and define his legacy as the destroyer of Iraq rather than its savior. Saddam believed, even more so than most US officials, that nuclear weapons were a likely response to his escalation. A letter from President Bush threatened "horrible consequences" and Secretary of Defense Cheney said the United States' response "would be absolutely overwhelming and it would be devastating."<sup>58</sup>

When his military objectives outside Iraq could no longer be achieved, Saddam turned his focus back to his most primary objective; keeping his power in Iraq. The significant forces still able to fight were turned against both the Shiite and the Kurdish uprisings with brutal fierceness. Saddam carefully accepted and observed the UN Security Council resolutions and the terms of the cease-fire in these critical days, giving the coalition no reason to interfere with his internal affairs.<sup>59</sup>

### **RISKS**

The risks of Saddam's course of action hinged on the validity of his assumptions. If events failed to transpire and nations failed to react as he predicted, his plan could unravel and lead to complete failure. All of his key pre-hostility assumptions regarding Arab unity, United States involvement, and UN condemnation proved false. His assumptions on U.S. national willpower, the cohesion of the coalition, the actions of Russia, an estimate of the relative military balance of power and the type of war which would occur were never truly tested due to the rapid and devastating success of the coalition, starting with the first day of the air war. If Saddam had been able to inflict heavy casualties and protract the war as he wanted, both coalition cohesion and U.S. willpower would have undoubtedly suffered and made negotiations more favorable to Iraq likely.

Saddam's attempts to influence America's will to fight backfired badly. All his threats, the use of hostages, and the display of downed pilots on television only served to reinforce his villainy and steeled the will to strike him. He failed to see the complete difference between Vietnam and this situation, which had strong public support, well defined and militarily obtainable objectives, a clear chain of command, and a revitalized all-volunteer force.

Saddam seemed most surprised by the stance of the Soviet Union. Despite the huge changes within the USSR and their increasing relationship with the West, Saddam still expected them to assume their counter role to the United States and block any action in the United Nations. When the Soviets failed to support Iraq, honored the economic sanctions, and pulled out its advisors, Saddam should have had grave misgivings regarding his selected course of action.

Saddam failed to generate an Arab coalition, a terrorist assault or to sway world opinion in any way. Ironically, perhaps the most effective weapon he held to delay military action was the international hostages, but he chose to release them in an attempt to gain world support and remove an obstacle to his legitimacy.<sup>60</sup> However, Saddam's atrocities, most notably his ecological terrorism which included dumping oil into the Gulf, setting oil fields on fire and using fire trenches solidified coalition resolve, branded Saddam as an evil and irresponsible dictator and continued to impede any chance he had at legitimacy.

Saddam's assumption about the fragility of the coalition did not pan out. Despite having varying national interests, Arabs, Europeans, and the United States were united in their condemnation of annexing

another country by force and Israel showed restraint in not getting involved militarily and escalating the matter. Saddam's appeal to Arab and Islamic unity rang hollow and his attempt to turn the issue into an Israel - Palestinian affair gained support only in the PLO.<sup>61</sup>

Just 15 days before the air operations began, the Iraqi ambassador stated, "It is an illusion if anyone thinks that an Egyptian or a Syrian or a Moroccan will fight the Iraqis."<sup>62</sup> This was a nearly valid assumption since General Khaled bin Sultan of Saudi Arabia wrote in his memoirs, "The Syrians told me very clearly, and the Egyptians somewhat more tactfully, that they could not consider entering Iraq, nor indeed could any Arab troops including our own."<sup>63</sup> This, however, did not preclude fighting Iraqis on Kuwaiti soil.

Saddam clearly underestimated the impact air power could have in shaping the battlefield. Coalition air superiority nullified Iraqi intelligence collection, fixed their ground forces in place, weakened the elaborate obstacle system, destroyed over one-third of all their ground armor and artillery, disrupted the command and control network, halted the logistics flow, and demoralized their troops.<sup>64</sup> The inability to see the battlefield allowed the coalition to buildup the forces in the west necessary for the flanking left hook and, without a workable command and control, Iraq was uncoordinated and ineffective in their reactionary warfare.<sup>65</sup> Air power in a desert environment is an absolutely critical factor. The total freedom of action granted by air superiority allows greater operational reach, force protection and selected enemy force destruction.<sup>66</sup>

While some of Saddam's initial assumptions based on Vietnam, the Iran war and hostage crisis, and Lebanon were correct, he was never allowed to shape the battle into the protracted warfare necessary to make these assumptions facts. Without an active command and control system and with limited intelligence collection, Saddam did not and could not reassess the situation quickly enough to alter his course of action. This, coupled with his tendency to shoot any messenger that brought bad news, ensured pursuit of a strategy beyond the point when other actions may have decreased his losses.<sup>67</sup>

Saddam was more than willing to suffer the costs he actually did in the Gulf war and much more, however he was ready to concede these costs only for the reward of some Kuwaiti territory. Saddam would concede his military forces up to the point where his Republican Guard could no longer guarantee his continued rule. Even at this weakened state, he would be able to use his weapons of mass destruction as leverage against any assault by other nations until his wealth and conventional forces could regenerate.<sup>68</sup>

#### AMERICAN LESSONS LEARNED

While U.S. planning and objectives in the war were meticulous and clear, the actual decision to end the war seemed rather ad hoc. From the very beginning, a stated objective was to inflict maximum damage upon the Republican Guard, however, once the media reported the true magnitude of the rout and showed pictures of the "highway of death", the administration's conscience prevented them from exploiting their advantage to its ultimate conclusion.<sup>69</sup>

The mistake which continues to plague the world is the failure to remove Saddam from power. Even though one of the United States' objectives was the security and stability of Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf, and President Bush compared Saddam to Hitler, no statement of any kind called for Saddam's ouster.<sup>70</sup> Colin

Powell summed up official Washington policy stating, "We hoped that Saddam would not survive the coming fury. But his elimination was not a stated objective."<sup>71</sup> It was felt that Arab public opinion would not support U.S. intervention in the government of Iraq.

The actions or inactions of America and her allies to clearly articulate the desire for a new regime and failure to encourage and bolster already occurring insurrections in Iraq signaled that there was really no interest in replacing Saddam. The UN stood idly by while the Republican Guard ruthlessly crushed both the Shiite and Kurdish uprisings in the country. The Arabs and especially Saudi Arabia were more distressed by the thought of a Shiite run Iraq that would have obvious sympathies with Iran than with the thought of leaving Saddam in power.<sup>72</sup> From the U.S. perspective, this lack of intervention may have resulted from the mistaken belief that toppling Saddam would prolong our involvement in nation-building and would prevent us from disengaging quickly from political, economic and military operations in support of a new regime or of a new emerging government.<sup>73</sup> Arguably, the regional security has been maintained only by the continued presence of a large U.S. military force in the region. This standing force has been rapidly augmented twice since 1991 to respond to further threats and defiances by Saddam and stands ready to strike again in February, 1998.

Or perhaps the U.S. intentionally avoided a clean start with a new regime, preferring instead a policy of keeping Saddam "in a box". Knowing Saddam to be hostile to compromise with Western governments and unwilling to surrender his weapons of mass destruction allows an internationally sanctioned means of guaranteeing U.S. presence in the region. The continued operation engenders a closer dependence on American military protection by the oil monarchies and ensures the continued superiority of Israel over any Arab nation.<sup>74</sup> The intrusive inspection regimen effectively reduces the Iraqi threat and enhances stability while economic sanctions continue to prevent weapons imports or allow Iraq to gain the financial resources to purchase materials for their WMD program.<sup>75</sup>

A revolt by the people is highly unlikely since they are ruled by a whole class of powerful men who can only be removed by a force beyond the reach of the underprivileged. In addition, UN economic sanctions have actually decreased the chance of rebellion since the peasants must use all their energy and resources just to gain the food and materials necessary to survive, leaving no will left to revolt.<sup>76</sup>

#### **PAST PROLOGUE - IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE**

Saddam believed that even if he lost militarily in DESERT STORM, he could still win politically.<sup>77</sup> After 7 years of tension, he has certainly gained back some lost ground.<sup>78</sup> He undoubtedly still has unconventional weapons and the means to deliver them. He stands to gain from any U.S. action by winning sympathy for the Iraqi people's plight. He points out the hypocrisy of the U.S. crusade against them. Why is Iraq sanctioned and allowed no weapons of mass destruction while Israel sits on a nuclear stockpile? Why does the UN only enforce resolutions against Iraq while ignoring those still in place against Israel? Why are the people of Iraq still punished for an aggression while Israel can commit an act of aggression with no repercussions? It is hard to explain to the world court that one nation is responsible and another irresponsible when their actions appear to mirror each other.

So how does the U.S. respond to Saddam Hussein? As Sun Tzu pointed out, "what is of supreme importance in war is to attack the enemy's strategy."<sup>79</sup> First the U.S. must truthfully answer (at least covertly) whether it wants Saddam to remain in power under the thumb of the UN or wants a new regime to take the reins. It may not only be a question of which option provides better stability to the region, but which option ensures just enough friction within the Arab world to prevent a powerful coalition that could threaten U.S. and Israeli interests. Also, does the U.S. seek a goal of normalization and does it wish to disengage physically from the region?

If the answer is to keep Saddam in power, yet too weak to carry out any significant threat, then a military response should not be chosen. Instead, the embargo should continue, allowing all the food and medicine into Iraq that the country needs to help their people, but halting virtually all other materials. No more mention or pressure should be placed on Iraq regarding UN weapons inspections unless and until Saddam asks for them to continue.

If the answer is to remove Saddam Hussein from power or at least gain his full compliance to UN demands, then the coalition must strike militarily at his strategy. In addition to continuing the embargo as mentioned above which curtails his personal wealth, forces should strike at all the objects Saddam personally holds dear. When reviewing the target list during Desert Storm, President Bush personally removed "statues of Saddam and triumphal arches thought to be of great psychological value to the Iraqi people as national symbols."<sup>80</sup> These should be added back to the target list. Exclude any object over 20 years old, but everything Saddam has built to deify himself or provide grist for his personal legacy should be destroyed. This includes any of his palaces which are suspected of any military use, and even those that are not, if they can be struck with minimum collateral damage. Finally, garrisons of the Republican Guard and his personal security force plus any command and control bunkers that may house any members of the inner circle should be targeted if possible. This would strike at the heart of his personal security and provide a strong impetus for his overthrow. Even if he survives, once he sees all the progress he had made towards achieving his strategic goal being systematically destroyed, he may modify his goal and seek more modest objectives.

## CONCLUSION

When General Schwarzkopf was asked what he thought of Saddam as a strategist he replied, "Ha! As far as Saddam Hussein being a great military strategist, he is neither a strategist nor schooled in the operational arts, nor is he a tactician, nor is he a general, nor is he a soldier."<sup>81</sup> While accurate on the surface, it gives no credit to Saddam for actually having and following a rational operational design towards his strategic goal...a design still in motion. It also belittles the astonishing achievements, albeit by hideous means, of Saddam Hussein.

Here was a man who had manipulated a small and unrepresentative political grouping, the Baath, into a mass movement which controlled every institution in the state according to his personal bidding. He had built a vast army, survived a costly war, and refused to abandon his long-term ambitions because of short-term setbacks.<sup>82</sup>

Seven years after accepting the most lopsided military defeat in history, Saddam is still pressing forward with his operational plan. Having rejected the unconditional weapons inspections called for by the UN, he defies punishment. The coalition is shattered. The USSR, now Russia, openly opposes any military action by the United States. Egypt, while still condemning Iraq's actions is actively recruiting support to prevent a military response as well. Even Saudi Arabia will not allow a strike against Iraq using forces based in their country. For the U.S. there is no easy answer. Whether or not military might is once again used against Iraq, it is clear that U.S. influence in the Gulf has dwindled, while Arab nations are once more feeling the pull of their common obligations. An Iraqi scholar said it best when he eerily stated in late 1991, "Saddam Hussein is not finished. There is an old Arab proverb...'Enemies today may be friends tomorrow.'"<sup>83</sup>

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